

Rethinking Regional Leadership in the Global Disorder

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Article

Rethinking Regional Leadership in the Global Disorder

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Abstract

Current power transitions in the context of China's rise and US retrenchment have significantly conditioned the forms and effects of regional leadership across different world regions. Against this empirical background, this *Special Issue* gathers innovative conceptual and theoretical perspectives to study the links between regional leadership and multipolarity in Europe, the Middle East, post-Soviet Eurasia, South America and South Asia. The introductory article provides a conceptual base for defining and explaining regional leadership and discusses the key arguments and findings of the individual articles.

Keywords

Regional Leadership, Multipolarity, Power Transition, Balancing, Rising Powers, China

Introduction

The debate about how and why contemporary rising powers project their influence regionally, rooted in post-Cold War observations of power transitions, is in need of a review. With the potential strategic retreat of US leadership in some regions, the form and effectiveness of regional leadership projects will likely be tested more than ever in contemporary times. Available frameworks of regional leadership still insufficiently account for this scenario.

Most importantly, the concept of regional leadership is fragmented in the field of International Relations (IR) theory. First, scholars have added secondary connotations such as “cooperative”, “political” or “economic leadership” without first conceptualising leadership itself, thereby reducing conceptual clarity. Second,

scholars have used the concept interchangeably with related terms such as “hegemony”, “primacy”, and “domination”. Third, linking both positive and negative connotations to regional leadership has charged the concept with different and partly diverging normative values.

This special issue of *Rising Powers Quarterly* seeks to mitigate some of these conceptual shortcomings and contribute to our understanding of the evolving conditions under which regional leadership operates by providing empirical perspectives on power politics in Europe, the Middle East, post-Soviet Eurasia, South America and South Asia.

Conceptualizing Regional Leadership

To begin with, analyses of regional leadership in multipolar systems need to account for the complexity in which interactions between structures and actors are embedded. The most promising IR scholarship has developed multidimensional concepts of regional leadership that reflect the possibility that power could increase in one dimension and, at the same time, shrink in another. Baldwin (2002, pp.178–179) has inspired more recent analyses by outlining the key dimensions of regional leadership variation:

1. *Scope*. Referring to the possibility that an actor’s power might vary in different policy fields (economics, security).
2. *Domain*. Defining the size of an actor’s influence on others (regional, global).
3. *Weight*. Describing the reliability of an actor’s power (the chance to put one’s will into practice against the will of others).
4. *Costs*. Indicating the price an actor is willing and able to pay to achieve other actors’ compliance.
5. *Means*. Including symbolic, economic, military and diplomatic methods of exercising power.

States that play a regional leading role in the sense of rule making are also given special importance when the treatment of global problems is concerned. This applies to questions of global norm-building, world trade, and transnational security risks. Attempts to solving problems in these areas can be organised at the regional and global levels. In both cases some state actors play a more important role than others in the course of cooperation and negotiation processes and therefore have more influence on the results.

The reason for this could be the greater military or economic potential of these

actors. Similarly, their legitimacy, diplomatic effectiveness, moral authority and representative function for a region or group of states might generate advantages in international bargaining. Depending on their relative power resources the regional leaders choose different strategies in regional and international bargaining processes. The most promising leadership strategy that defines the foreign policy instruments applied by the regional powers can differ according to the systemic level (regional, global). A key objective of this special issue is to identify the foreign policy resources and instruments that regional powers apply under consideration on different systemic levels.

With regard to the global level of analysis, the status of a regional leader implies that dominant actors of the international system accept this status. What is even more important is the degree to which regional powers manage to influence the global economic and security order. The degree of assertion of interests in global governance institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization is supposed to serve as an indicator for power over outcomes.

A crucial reason for the declining but enduring US hegemony in international relations is its military supremacy. Washington still accounts for more than half of for global defense expenditures. In conventional military terms the US will remain the dominant global power for a long time. From a Realist perspective a multipolar system could be the results from the emergence of balancing coalitions against the global system's dominant power by regional powers who successfully achieved the position of the unipole in their regions (Wohlforth 1999, p.30). Linking this statement with the developing countries' lack of power in the international system (measurable for instance in IMF voting power or permanent seats at the UN Security Council) multipolarisation becomes a priority foreign policy objective of developing states. In addition to forming balancing coalitions, these regional powers will likely seek to advance the transformation toward multipolarity by increasing their influence in international institutions. In particular, the governments of Southern states that have the capacity to build regional unipolarities, must be interested in finding an effective way to challenge the current international hierarchy and to transform themselves into power poles of a future multipolar system. One way to project significant global influence (decision-maker status) is by consolidation regional powerhood as a base for pursuing national interests in the multipolar order.

In other words, rising powers need to determine which role they seek to play in their respective regions and whether they are willing to bear the cost of regional leadership before defining their global policy and status goals. With the exception of Russia, which is the only case under consideration that is permanent UN Security Council member, all articles in this special issue deal with global-level middle powers instead of great powers on the global stage. As Cox (1996, p.241)

has suggested, “the middle-power role is not a fixed universal” but a concept and set of practices that continually evolve in search of different forms of actorness. If sharing some similar characteristics on the need for rules and order in multi-lateral institutions, middle powers differ significantly on their regional roles such as pursuing divergent preferences on the region’s direction and pathes of regional institutionalisation.

With regard to the (intra)regional level of analysis, the degree of coordination, formalisation and institutionalisation of trade and security policies is an indicator of the quality of the intraregional cooperation. In addition to free trade agreements, bilateral and multilateral measures in the sectors infrastructure, technology and energy are included in the investigation. The mutual transparency between the states in key areas such as defence planning, arms trade and military budget indicates the degree of confidence building between the neighbouring countries, and transnational threats can encourage the creation of cooperative security policies in the investigated regions. In particular, non-military security challenges imply direct threats to the states: drug trafficking and arms trade as well as money laundering as forms of organised crime, activities by guerrilla organisations across the national borders, transnational terrorism and the proliferation of means of mass destruction. On the contrary, it is possible that the regional power itself poses a regional threat or is perceived as such.

Considering these observations, the case selection of this special issue is based on the following definition of regional powerhood. As suggested by Flesmes and Nolte (2010, p.23), a regional power

1. Is part of a geographically delimited region;
2. Is ready to assume leadership;
3. Displays the necessary material and ideational capabilities for regional power projection; and
4. Is highly influential in regional affairs.

Conceivable further criteria for distinguishing and classifying different types of regional powers are

1. Economic, political and cultural interconnectedness of the regional power within its region;
2. The provision of collective goods for the region;
3. The existence of an ideational leadership project; and

4. The acceptance of the leadership by potential followers.

We argue that Brazil, Colombia, Germany, India, Russia, and Saudi Arabia fulfil at least the four basic criteria of regional powerhood.

Explaining Regional Leadership

This special issue aims to develop novel approaches to analysing and modelling the foreign policies of regional powers in the multipolar system. More specifically, the authors present innovative concepts from different theoretical perspectives to explain and manage the complex challenges related to regional leadership. Each article outlines a particular theoretical lens and applies it to a world region that is distinct from the others by a particular power structure and politics, culture of interaction and domestic system. We invited analyses from two main theoretical camps that have generated the most inspiring contributions to the debates on regional leadership and multipolarity over the past decade: (Neo)Realism and Constructivism. Both grand theories have constantly been complemented and developed further. Each of the six articles of this special issue outlines a particular theoretical lens and applies it to a world region that is distinguished from others by a particular power structure and politics, culture of interaction or domestic system.

Rethinking Realist Perspectives

Realist perspectives on leadership are often associated with the concepts of power and/or hegemony. However, both concepts are strongly contested in the literature. Classical Realists depict international cooperation as “a necessary function of the balance of power operating in a multiple state system” (Morgenthau 1967: 175). For those traditional Realists, international institutions are always a function of state power and interests. Neorealism assumes that states ally to balance against the superior power capabilities of other states. Power capabilities are the determining factor of states’ choices (Waltz 1979). It has been common for Neorealists to use the term ‘hegemony’ as a synonym for dominance or disproportionately preponderant capabilities (Waltz 1979). It would be rational for a hegemon to use its preponderant power in the interest of the system as a whole, because his power only exists relative to the systemic context in which it is embedded.

Three of the special issue’s contributions engage with variations of (Neo)Realism: First, Alcides Costa Vaz (University of Brasilia) examines regional leadership in South America. In the past 10 years of IR scholarship, South America’s ... viewed through the prism of Brazil’s rise as the region’s primary rising power and its potential function as a bridge between aspiring and established powers (e.g., Burges 2016). Brazil, which is South America’s largest country in terms of population, territory, GDP and defence expenditures, has experienced sustained

high economic growth since 2002 and has become the eight largest economy by GDP in 2017. Gradually, Brasilia raised its regional and global diplomatic profile, increasingly vocally claiming a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, pushing for reforms in the international financial institutions and taking a proactive stance in new institutions such as the G20, the BRICS and the IBSA forum. A key novelty was Brazil's emergence as an informal spokesperson for both South America and the emerging world order (Rachman 2017). In this role, Brazil pursued varying forms of "concertación" (literally concertation) (Merke 2015) or consensual and cooperative hegemony (Burgess 2015) that were perceived favourably or met with modest soft and institutional balancing by South American neighbours (Flemes & Wehner 2015).

However, a series of recent crises has severely challenged overly optimistic depictions of Brazil's trajectory as a pivotal regional leader and aspiring great power. Brazil's economy has suffered a huge recession that has combined weak growth with high deficits, and low investments, and its state plunged into a political crisis following corruption scandals that engulfed the political and business elite. Costa Vaz (University of Brasilia) puts this situation into perspective by adopting the analytical framework of "restraint" developed by Brent J. Steele and Barry Posen to assess the prospects of Brazil's regional leadership after the Workers Party (PT) era. Steele and Posen understand restraint as a merger of selective engagement and isolationism. Since taking office in 2016, Brazil's President Michel Temer has sought to reinvigorate the state's foreign policy, but his efforts have been severely constrained by domestic political and ideological polarisation on one hand and regional political and economic fragmentation on the other. Thus, domestic and regional constraints have thus contributed to a shift towards restraint as a constitutive feature of Brazil's foreign policy. Again, the waning role of the US as a semi-engaged hegemon and the increasing footprint of China in South America are likely to create conditions to which Brazil's restraint will have to adapt in the future.

Second, Nicolas Blarel (Leiden University) and Hannes Ebert (GIGA Institute of Asian Studies) assess India's regional leadership in South Asia. India is a particularly instructive case for studying the ambivalences in the linkages between regional leadership and global aspirations. While successive governments partly succeeded in reinventing India's global role after the end of the Cold War, increasing its voice in international institutions and enhancing its strategic ties with multiple regional and great powers such as the US, their efforts to garner regional followership were lukewarm and overall ineffective (Ganguly 2018). In particular, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, redressed New Delhi's efforts to break the deadlock in South Asian cooperation when coming into office in 2014. The government took steps to aggressively defend India's proclaimed dominant role

in the region against the never-ending opposition of its enduring rival Pakistan, rising Chinese investments and influence in South Asia, and growing nationalism tied to anti-Indian sentiments in states such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Jaishankar 2016). This included emphasising South Asian but also wider Indo-Pacific regionalism (Pant 2017). IR scholarship on regional leadership still struggles to adequately account for the arduous transformation of India's South Asia policies (Ebert & Blarel 2018).

Against this background, Blarel and Ebert observe that Realist and Liberalist expectations on the effects of a unipolar regional distribution of power capabilities in South Asia have not materialised. Attempts by the Indian state to establish a stable order through coercive or deterrent force or generate followership through institutions and public goods provision failed, and high levels of interstate violence and low levels of regional integration persist in the region. This is puzzling given that India has enjoyed overwhelming superiority of conventional power capabilities in the region since its independence in 1947 and, in particular, since Pakistan's breakup in 1971. Blarel and Ebert suggest that leadership in the region is profoundly conditioned by the social interactions between leader and potential followers of the South Asian post-Cold War order. As a first step of building a contextualised understanding of leadership, both authors refer to English School conceptualisations of hegemony that propose constructing regional leadership through observations of the social interactions associated with the primary power's expected regional roles and responsibilities. By tracing India's regional leadership roles and responsibilities in a set of interactions during Indo-Pakistani crises in the post-Cold War, Blarel and Ebert conclude that the Indian state is still searching an effective strategy to adopt to a two-decades-old context: the presence of nuclear weapons and non-state militants, used by South Asia's secondary power Pakistan to prevent at all costs India's regional dominance.

Finally, through their analysis of distinct dyadic military crises, the authors demonstrate that India's traditional deterrence doctrine has failed to dissuade non-state militants from engaging in asymmetric attacks against India's symbols of leadership such as its political capital Delhi and its commercial centre Mumbai. Thus, in an attempt to adapt to this context, New Delhi sought to reform its deterrence toolkit and revive its military deterrence capacities' credibility as a precondition for effective leadership, devising military options such as the public re-branding of cross-border firing as "surgical strikes" to efficiently target militant groups and other forms of coercive diplomacy. However, this transformation is ongoing and is far from terminated. Thus far, the conventionally more powerful state has felt compelled to limit its ambitions and install new mechanisms for credible deterrence. Thus, Blarel and Ebert suggest that IR scholarship should further investigate the ways in which non-state actors in a nuclearised rivalry

context truncate the stabilising effects of unipolar regional systems.

Third, Anna Sunik (Heidelberg University) analyzes Saudi Arabia's leadership aspirations in the Middle East. The Middle East has not featured prominently in the IR study of regional leadership and multipolarity, partly because of the lack of one precipitously rising power with rapid high economic growth and increasing global clout (Fawcett 2013). Even before the so-called Arab uprisings that began in 2010, observers argued that the Middle Eastern regional order was broken (Salem 2008). Structures and power balances established in the late 1970s and amended since the end of the Cold War eroded with the collapse of Iraq as a centralised sovereign state and the cessation of its function as a buffer between the aspiring regional powers Iran and Turkey. Today, 15 years after the US invasion of Iraq, aspiring states militarily escalate their claims in multiple proxy conflicts and civil wars. Having sensed waning US commitment to the Middle East, whose military capabilities in the region had outweighed those of all other regional states, contenders for leadership - including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates - have jostled for influence and status to promote their diverging economic, ideological, nationalistic and sectarian agendas (cp. Cook, Stokes & Brock 2014).

However, the fact that "the Middle East features for not having produced a regional power" (Beck 2014, p.2) does not mean that understanding international politics in the region through the lens of regional leadership would not yield value. In contrast, the current transformations of regional order in the Middle East require us to update and refine our interpretations of the past and prospective structural parameters. Against this background, Sunik examines Saudi Arabia's new interventionism as part of its leadership bid in the Middle East as exemplified in its intervention in Yemen. To date, Saudi Arabia has been able to mitigate conventional military disadvantages vis-à-vis Iran by capitalising on its greater wealth ("riyalpolitik") and close alliance with the US. Since 2011, Saudi Arabia not only ramped up its defense spending but also intensified its regional foreign policy activities, participating in the coalition against the so-called "Islamic State", engaging in Bahrain, supporting anti-government rebels in Syria, building a multilateral coalition to fight terrorism, and co-initiating a pro-longed military intervention in Yemen. The last of these actions, initiated in March 2015, is particularly noteworthy as it was the first full-scale military operation by Saudi Arabia and its partners exclusively under regional leadership.

Sunik demonstrates that this resurgence has been driven by a combination of power-driven balance-of-threat impulses and regime security considerations linked to identity issues that construct Iran as a threat to domestic stability, as extent studies on "omnibalancing" rightly revealed. In particular, the power vacuum that ensued US withdrawal compelled the kingdom to step up its efforts to inde-

pendently guarantee its regional interests. After the collapse of Iraq, the hitherto tripolar Persian Gulf system transformed broadly into a bipolar struggle with Iran, only exacerbated by the post-2011 turmoil. While “omnibalancing” explanations sufficiently uncover this dynamic, they fail to account for the specific shape (multilateral “coalition of the willing”) and location (Yemen instead of Syria) of the intervention. To fill this gap, Sunik draws on the scholarship on authoritarian institutions and their symbolic functions. Authoritarian states form alliances not just to provide security but also to build reputation and prestige. From this perspective, Sunik finds that the kingdom intervened multilaterally in Yemen to signal ability, resolve and commitment to replace US dominance in the region and thereby foster its claim for broader regional leadership. Thus, by combining domestic and systemic drivers of regional leadership, Sunik highlights how potential regional powers feel compelled or willing to expand their traditional foreign policy toolbox in order to adopt to novel regional opportunity structures in the transition toward global multipolarity. Again, whether Riyadh’s signalling of regional leadership resolve garners sufficient followership to back-up its claims remains an open empirical question.

Rethinking Constructivist Perspectives

The status of a regional power is also a social category and therefore depends not at least on the acceptance of this status, and the associated social hierarchy, by others. Thus, it is important to include the role conceptions, ideas, norms and perceptions in the discussion on regional leadership and global disorder. Social interactions can have transformative effects on the interests and identities of state actors and their continuous cooperation is likely to influence intersubjective meanings. Effectively formulating and implementing a consensual idea-driven regional project could help regional powers to enhance legitimacy of their leadership role. An ideational leadership project as such aims at producing common norms and ideas among the regional states. Three of the special issue’s contributions engage with variations of Constructivist thinking:

The first is Hanns W. Maull’s (German Institute for International and Security Affairs) analysis of Germany’s leadership role in Europe. Again, Europe is not among the “usual suspects” of regions discussed in IR scholarship on regional leadership and multipolarity. From the view of regional power politics, Europe is first and foremost home to established powers, two of which, France and the UK, are nuclear states with a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. Recent debates have focused on Germany’s growing power capabilities and diplomatic influence, examining how that country’s rising regional and global ambitions will shape and be shaped by what is still a multipolar European system and the evolving global order. Amidst recent calls to become “more active” in solving the multiple simultaneous crises in and beyond Europe, some observers

concluded that the 21st century's second decade is Germany's 'unipolar moment' in Europe (Brattberg & De Lima 2015) and the 'German moment in a fragile world' (Bagger 2015). A consensus has emerged that Germany has shifted from Europe's 'sick man' in the early 20th century to being its leading economic powerhouse, driven by a chancellor with international acclaim, a public attractiveness as the 'most popular country' (Chokshi 2016), and the football World Champion, as well as its peers' relative weaknesses.

However, the hegemonic traits of Germany's position in the evolving European hierarchy of power have been subject to heated debate (cp. Harnisch 2014; Flemes & Ebert 2017). While some contended that "the world waits for Germany" (Blyth & Matthijs 2012), that "Germany must lead or leave [the euro]" (Soros 2012), that "Germany is a great power" and "should act like one" (Burrows & Gnad 2016), and that Germany in the context of the refugee crisis has evolved as the world's "new can-do nation" (Cohen 2015) and as "enforcer, facilitator and benefactor in Europe's triple crisis" (Matthijs 2016, p.135), other commentators have stressed the limits of German power (Kleine-Brockhoff & Maull 2011; Perthes 2016), framing its position and policies in terms of "contested hegemony" (Jürgens 2013), "semi hegemony" (Kundnani 2014) or "reluctant hegemony" (Patterson 2011; Bunde & Oroz 2015; Kornelius 2015) and discrediting Germany's acclaimed 'unipolar moment' as a "myth" (Schwarzer & Lang 2012; Nicholson 2015). Historical Institutionalist analyses of Germany's emerging international role have highlighted the country's structural embeddedness in Europe (Crawford 2007; Bulmer 2013). Realist analyses, meanwhile, have argued that Germany's political leadership has tangibly strived for a more autonomous, power-based, unilateralist foreign policy (Hellmann 2011).

Maull engages with this debate by drawing the evolving German leadership status in Europe through the lens of role theory drawing on the civilian power approach. Domestic and regional pressures have compelled the German state to significantly adjust both its "ego" and "alter" components of its foreign policy role concept, that is, the expectations regarding its role by itself and by others. Role theory postulates that these normative expectations have the power to shape foreign policy behavior. At the domestic level, the emergence of a right-wing populist party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) constituted the first impactful challenge to Germany's traditional pro-European policies. At the regional level, multiple crises related to socio-economic challenges in some Eurozone states, migration, and the Ukraine conflict brought Germany into a position of a broker of a common European or even Western positions. Maull illustrates how throughout these crises, Berlin was preoccupied with reconciling internal and external expectations regarding its expected role, which have become increasingly diverse and contradictory. Except during the Eurozone crisis, where German leadership

was forceful and sing-minded, Berlin has managed to garner support for a management mode of “leadership from behind”, which remained relatively close its traditional civilian power role concept, although this continuity might become increasingly contested both from within and abroad in the future.

Eduardo Pastrana and Diego Vera (Javeriana University) offer a second refinement of Constructivist thinking on regional leadership in an era of evolving multipolarity. Their contribution draws attention to a sub-region that has not been substantially studied from a regional leadership perspective: Central America and the Caribbean and the Pacific Alliance. Thus far, IR scholarship on the region has focused on intrastate violence, its regional and international repercussions, and the role of extra-regional states as conflict mediators. Scholarship failed to notice that in the context of a transition from civil war to peace, the Colombian state has cautiously sought ways to envision and play a role of regional leader in the region.

From a theoretical angle similar to that of Maull, Pastrana and Vera explore the leadership role of post-conflict Colombia in the Caribbean Basin and the Pacific Alliance. They frame the new role conception of the Colombian foreign policy by adopting the concepts of functional leadership and niche diplomacy. In President Juan Manuel Santos’s two terms in power since 2010, Colombia sought to expand its foreign policy previously focused on narrow trade and security concerns and increase its influence in the region through so-called South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation. Bogotá has sought to step up its contribution to conflict resolution and knowledge transfer. Pastrana and Vera conclude that, in doing so, it has paved the way for thematic and geographical niche diplomacy as a form of Colombian leadership.

Finally, Regina Heller’s (Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy) exploration of Russia’s leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia provides a third Constructivist-inspired perspective on regional leadership. One of the developments that has most exigently revealed the need to rethink some of IR’s dominant power politics propositions is Russia’s recent efforts to redress the stark decline in its presence in post-Soviet Eurasia. Scholars and policy-makers have debated Russia’s credentials as the predominant power in the region and self-proclaimed status as a great power (MacFarlane 2018). While the country’s military prowess and political influence make it a key global player, its weakening economy has sparked doubts about the sustainability of its aspirations, and growing opposition to its regional initiatives even by some of its traditional regional allies such as Kazakhstan and Armenia following the annexation of Crimea have challenged Russia’s claims for leadership (Meister 2018). With the 2013-2014 crisis in Ukraine, the Kremlin’s fixation with great power status and with the West as an “object of emulation or as a defining other” (Wilson 2017, p.19) has become even more linked to its ongoing national identity construction and domestic legitimation.

Regina Heller engages with social psychology and emotions research in IR to trace the drivers of Russia's regional leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia, exemplified by its recent foreign policy towards Ukraine. From the outset, Heller challenges dominant Realist approaches to explain Russia's annexation of Crimea and interference in Eastern Ukraine with exclusive reference to power politics considerations. Contrary to these approaches, Moscow's Ukraine policy has not exclusively – and not even predominantly – been driven by the objective to maximise its relative power position and influence in the region by occupying strategic locations and coercing post-Soviet states into submission. How else, Heller asks, would these approaches account for the observation that Russia has overall lost influence over the country and the overall region and compromised its principled defence of the norms of state sovereignty and non-intervention. Rather, Russia's Ukraine policy and by extension its leadership aspirations toward the post-Soviet region has primarily been driven by the urge for social recognition as a regional leader. Russia is willing to restore its status even at the risk of losing influence.

Based on a social psychology perspective, Heller analyses the official Russian discourse in the Ukraine crisis to trace the process in which unresolved behavioural and cognitive anger over Russia's perceived status deprivation as well as unfair, unreliable and humiliating treatment by the West in the context of the Soviet Union's dissolution has driven Moscow's regional policies. Under Russian President Vladimir Putin, the attempt to establish regional primacy in the post-Soviet Eurasia has become increasingly linked to efforts to construct a collective identity in which Russia is a central and equal entity in a global order that has so far been dominated by the West. By illustrating the core signifiers in this conception, Heller's article exhibits how in a period of power transitions the aspirations for regional hegemony are linked to social status seeking in the global order. However, in post-Soviet Eurasia it remains unclear whether the strategic use of moral justifications of aggressive foreign policy behaviour will suffice to not only increase domestic legitimization but also establish regional leadership.

Together, these articles represent empirical and analytical refinements of IR debates on regional leadership and multipolarity. All of the assessments highlight the need to take stock of the considerable geopolitical changes related to the rise of China and the evolving retrenchment of the US, and to assess the domestic pressures related to the upsurge of nationalist and populist politics – macro challenges to leadership across regions that will certainly further occupy future IR scholarship.

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Bio

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Hannes Ebert is a postdoctoral research fellow at the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, conducting research on rising powers, territorial dispute management, and cyber security in Asia.

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